



**Commander U.S. Pacific Fleet
Battle of Midway Commemoration
Marine's Memorial Club, San Francisco
Admiral Patrick M. Walsh
Saturday, June 4, 2011**

Distinguished guests, Fellow Flag Officers, Midway survivors, veterans, families, and friends...Good eveningThank you, Admiral Copeland, for the warm introduction.

Earlier this week on Memorial Day, we flew the flag at half-mast – we paused, reflected, recognized, and we memorialized the men and women who gave their lives in service to our country. We are fortunate to know that in times of turmoil or crisis, we can rely on fellow citizens who are willing to take great risk to themselves to protect us. Oftentimes, we do not know their names, only their branch of service as: Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen, Marines, National Guard, and Coast Guardsmen. They ask for little in return...simply to appreciate their sacrifice and to remember their loved ones.

I am most grateful for the opportunity to spend this evening with you and to stand in the presence of veterans who gave so much of themselves, so that we could have lives of promise, potential and opportunity. The San Francisco community's annual celebration of the Battle of Midway is a gift to past, current, and future generations by keeping alive the memories of a hard-won and improbable victory and those that made the ultimate sacrifice for their nation. Your tradition - 14 years strong - also honors the significant contributions of the San Francisco Bay area during World War II as a major logistics and personnel distribution point as well as an important shipbuilding and repair hub.

My remarks begin with you: our survivors, our veterans, our friends and our extended family...because the days pass too quickly, our opportunities with each other too fleeting, our reunions too limited, to miss out on a chance to express our personal gratitude to each other....for each other. Tonight is importantfor many reasons that connect and cut across several generations. We are part of a great circle of community, history, and tradition, where one generation cares for and nurtures the nextas evidenced by the presence of so many who came to honor the memory and service of loved ones.

This year also marks the centennial of Naval Aviation, the roots of which are tied to this great city. Only 31 years after Eugene Ely landed a Curtis Biplane on the deck of a cruiser moored in the San Francisco Bay, naval aviation changed the course of World War II and the future of naval warfare. The Battle of Midway stands out as a pivotal moment in time - when the role of aircraft launched from ships proved to be the decisive factor in the Pacific Campaign.

Commemorations of this battle and the Centennial of Naval Aviation are taking place throughout our Navy and among communities around the country. These formal ceremonies are important as they give us a rare and unique opportunity to learn more about our history, our culture, and our inheritance; it speaks as well to the next generation of Sailors and Marines in an enduring way that personifies moral character, personal sacrifice, self-less commitment, and courage under fire. Tonight is especially significant because it is an opportunity for us to express our appreciation to what history fondly remembers as the generation that answered the call of a

wounded nation, led a life of consequence, took action, and took risks for a cause far greater than self.

At the dawn of World War II, the nation was under assault...we had lost every battle that we entered. The damage to the nation was more than the physical destruction contained at Pearl Harbor; it was psychological, which according to historians, was far more widespread and debilitating. One author, Craig Nelson, described the country “in a state of panic by Christmas 1941. It was a time when most Americans thought the war was over, that the Axis had already won.” By early 1942, imperial forces had moved quickly through the Pacific and controlled most of Asia from Manchuria to the Dutch East Indies.

The nation – wounded, weak, and recovering, and despite daunting setbacks – was emotionally primed to retake the initiative. While historians have provided extensive analysis about the strategic importance of the battle itself; the tactical and operational lessons learned by the Navy; the ascendancy of naval air power; and the mistakes of the Japanese forces, ...it is the story of those who lived it...that provide the most inspiring and fascinating chapters in the historical narrative.

This story begins when the men and women of a determined nation were ‘all in,’ when they reached beyond themselves, pushed their machines beyond their limits, and risked everything beyond imagination, understanding, or comprehension.

It began with a battle; one that historians would later claim, “that by any standard, we had no right to win.” The stone inscription on the National WWII Memorial tells us: “They had no right to win. Yet they did, and in doing so, they changed the course of a war... even against the greatest of odds there is something in the human spirit – a magic blend of skill, faith and valor – that can lift men from certain defeat to incredible victory.”

Even today, scholars, historians, and journalists continue to write about the miraculous American triumph “against all odds.” Historian Samuel Eliot Morison described the Battle of Midway as “a victory, not only of courage, determination, [and] skill...but of bravery...” Renowned aviation artist R.G. Smith depicted the battle in his painting titled, “Turning Point” to describe its strategic importance. Indeed, the struggle at Midway was of David vs. Goliath proportions where U.S. forces, greatly outnumbered, but not outclassed, capitalized on strategic surprise to defeat Japan’s Imperial Navy and force it into defensive actions, foreshadowing the outcome of the Pacific War.

Code breakers gave us the element of surprise. Admiral Chester Nimitz used that intelligence to mastermind the battle. Men and women worked around the clock to build and repair battle damaged ships and aircraft.

Coming off a devastating battle at Coral Sea, USS YORKTOWN was badly damaged, and many thought it would take months to repair... but Pearl Harbor Naval Shipyard worked around the clock to repair her in just three days. She sailed to Midway and contributed heavily to the enemy’s defeat.

Thousands of American men and women took up rivet guns in the shipyards and factories to support the war effort. Thanks to the tireless effort of citizens like those in the Bay area, the U.S. outpaced Japan in aircraft production 25 to 1. From 1942 to the end of the war, for every major warship Japan built, the Americans raised 16. By August of 1945, Japan had manufactured seven aircraft carriers, while America produced 100.

Despite all the advantages of our weapons, Nimitz did not place his trust in these instruments of war. Even in the face of tremendous risk, Nimitz knew that men on the deck plates, on the ground, and in the cockpits would find the path to victory. The Admiral said, “our armament must be adequate to the needs [of battle], but our faith is not primarily in these machines of defense but in ourselves...I have always been optimistic regarding the eventual result of the war. Having seen the people on the spot, I have every reason to continue my optimism.”

It is important to understand what Sailors and Marines experienced and to know the humanity of their stories. Their biography inspires us; it gives us the insights into their indomitable spirit, strength, commitment, character, and resilience so that we understand the role that we must play when our country calls.

The Pulitzer Prize winning historian Arthur Schlesinger, Jr. wrote, “For history is to the nation as memory is to the individual.” Just as one person learns from his experiences, so, too, do we as a nation grow and mature when we reflect on our collective past. So many brave souls contributed to the success at Midway. Today we remember them. One who went beyond the call of duty - not once but several times was Captain Richard Fleming, the first Marine Aviator to receive the Medal of Honor in World War II, and the only man honored with this distinction at Midway.

Fleming carried out three separate missions with “extraordinary heroism and conspicuous intrepidity above and beyond the call of duty.” His award citation reads: “When his Squadron Commander was shot down during the initial attack upon an enemy aircraft carrier, Fleming led the remainder of his division with such fearless determination that he pressed his attack to the perilously low altitude of 400 feet before releasing his bomb. Although his craft was riddled by 179 hits in the blistering hail of fire that burst upon him from Japanese fighter guns and anti-aircraft batteries, he pulled out with only minor wounds.”

“Then, on the night of 4 June, Captain Fleming brought his own plane in for a safe landing at its base despite hazardous weather conditions and total darkness. The following day, after less than four hours’ sleep, he led the second division of his squadron in a coordinated glide-bombing and dive-bombing assault upon a Japanese battleship.” “Undeterred by a fateful approach glide, during which his [plane] was struck and set afire, he grimly pressed home his attack to an altitude of 500 feet, released his bomb then crashed in flames.” Captain Richard Fleming represents the invincible spirit that filled “the miraculous Men of Midway” -- men whose actions proved that they were stronger, more resilient, and capable of more than they realized or imagined.

In the end, Japan lost four carriers, 332 aircraft, over 2,500 men, and the Imperial Fleet sustained severe damages to many of its remaining ships. They lost their momentum, and we gained the offensive. The bravery, valor, and selfless sacrifice that took place at Midway defined us as a strong and resilient navy... and the victory achieved there turned the tides of the war and charted the path for a revitalized nation and the ultimate end to history’s deadliest military conflict.

Those of you who were part of that war may not realize how you have shaped the world in the Pacific or the impact of your efforts. Today, the quintessential gift that you gave the world was an opportunity for peace in the Pacific, and the gift that you have given to my generation is the opportunity for a proud, strong relationship with our counterparts from the Japanese Maritime Self-Defense Force. It is a friendship made possible by the battles that you fought and the conduct of the peace that you won. It is a relationship that exists now between families, based on trust, mutual respect, and an inner strength...understood and respected by the descendents of former combatants and warriors and further reinforced through our shared disaster relief response to their recent earthquake, tsunami and nuclear crisis. I have stood side-by-side with my Japanese counterparts at Pearl Harbor and Iwo Jima; at these events, I have witnessed survivors on both sides together and watched the cathartic effect of their meetings.

History is important for us to understand, especially since those in our profession are witness to it and help to shape it. We develop insights into human behavior; we learn how nations view themselves; and how...as well as why...states act on historical impulse, grievance, cultural identity, or sovereign passion. The parallels in history to modern day issues are striking; oftentimes we can find both the challenge as well as insights for a solution rooted in an analysis of past events.

The story of the American navy in the Pacific is incomplete without mention of where it begins. Our story begins in the American school that shapes and molds the minds of engineers. Engineers and manufacturers build the platforms that we use; families provide us their sons and daughters – our national treasure – who become our Navy-Marine Corps team. They use those remarkable machines with strength of conviction and valor...but that is not the end of the story...the our story is about strength but it is also about generosity and humanity...it is about what we must destroy in war and what we can build in peace as a guarantor of freedom and a force of last resort. Those who fought in the Battle of Midway were, by any measure, an extraordinary team, at a remarkable time in history when together they turned a page in history. Our Sailors and Marines represented the pride of a generation who gave more than they received and positively affected the lives of more people than you will ever know...and that, ladies and gentlemen, is our naval heritage and tradition.

Tonight, we remember. We remember the distinguished service of those who fought in the Battle of Midway...we remember the honor that they have brought to the navy and the nation, we remember those who have served and continue to serve...and we remember those who have supported us.

(Presentation)

In honor of our veterans, I would like to present this replica of the original chart used by Fleet Admiral Nimitz to record the significant events leading to the Battle of Midway. In red ink are the specific pieces of communications intelligence, organized by date of intercept and decoding by cryptanalysts. This critical information proved timely and accurate, as it informed and influenced the command decisions of Admiral Nimitz. Nimitz plotted U.S. force movements over the course of those incredible three days in blue ink, with the outcome of the battle recorded at the top.

This chart, simple and neat in its presentation yet complex in the summation of ideas, efforts, people, and events that it represents... is an example of the naval planning process at its finest, from inception to concept development to intelligence gathering to analysis to decision-making to execution and assessment. This is a unique piece of history, which captures the continuum of past, present and future at the same time. It is a testament to the importance of learning from the past, both immediately after the event or decades later. It has enabled generations of naval minds to learn the warning signs of an impending attack... to identify key elements of information required to aid the Commander's decision-making...and to assess the development, execution, and impact of a naval operation.

On the surface, it appears to encapsulate Nimitz's ultimately successful plan and execution of one of the most important naval missions in history. However, on a deeper level, its very existence encompasses the spirit of Navy teamwork and its ability to overcome great challenges.

To succeed in a sometimes stark and harsh environment, naval leaders learn, just as Admiral Nimitz did, to draw upon the capabilities, talents, insights, experiences, and creative energy of all those serving with them because oftentimes the success of the mission and the very survival of our forces depend on it. To succeed, leaders have to create a resilient, sustainable team from a very diverse group of talent and experience. The strength of the team has given the long blue line the ability to persist forward, against difficult challenges and overwhelming odds.

Ladies and gentlemen, please accept this gift which symbolizes the spirit of teamwork that triumphed at Midway and lives in the hearts of every member of the American armed forces. On behalf of the men and women of U.S. Pacific Fleet, thank you for your service and sacrifice and for the privilege and honor to speak tonight among a group of heroes who will forever be a part of our legacy. We will not forget your sacrifice and your service... and the world will never forget how many are free because of you.

God bless you, our country, and all those who stand with us.

Thank you.